

## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers July 17, 2006

### Michigan News

#### **Michigan Reaches Milestone**

For the fifth consecutive year, safety belt use has increased in Michigan, with the latest direct observation survey showing that 94 percent of motorists and their front seat passengers buckle up, according to the Wayne State University Transportation Research Group. More.....

[http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1593\\_3504-146813--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1593_3504-146813--,00.html)

### Latest Traffic Safety News

#### **Study Reports Vision Impaired By Moderate Drinking**

According to a study published this month in Applied Cognitive Psychology, even mild alcohol intoxication can seriously impair drinkers' visual acuity. Researchers found that test subjects who consumed just enough alcohol to reach half the legal alcohol intoxication level in the U.S. performed poorly on tests of their ability to notice an unexpected visual object when they were performing another simple task. Researchers said this was the first study to demonstrate that alcohol can cause such "inattentional blindness." Study author, Seema Clifasefi, said, "We rely on our ability to perceive a multitude of information when we drive (speed limit, road signs, other cars, etc. If even a mild dose of alcohol compromises our ability to take in some of this information, in other words, limits our attention span, then it seems likely that our driving ability may also be compromised."

Source: Clifasefi, S. L., Takarangi, M. K. T., Bergman, J. S. (2006) Blind drunk: the effects of alcohol on inattentional blindness. Applied Cognitive Psychology, 20(5): 697-704.

#### **Pennsylvania May Join States Banning Drivers' Hand-Held Cell Phone Use**

Hand-held cell phones were a factor in almost 1200 crashes in Pennsylvania in 2004. The state legislature is considering a bill to make hand-held phone use while driving a primary offense. Thus far, only CT, NJ, NY and DC have statewide laws restricting cell phone use while driving. No state prohibits hands-free phone use although a number of studies have shown that hands-free and hand-held phones are equally distracting.

#### **Demand For Highway Money For Real-Time Traffic Information**

A Vehicle Traffic Information Coalition has been formed to promote real-time information on all U.S. roadways. The membership includes representatives from GM, Ford and Daimler Chrysler as well as Honda and other auto manufacturers. Real-time traffic information is available in only one-third of U.S. metropolitan areas with at least 500K people. The intent is to convince state and local governments to use federal highway money on projects with motorist demands for relief from traffic jams to spur interest and pressure lawmakers.

#### **State DOTs Want Drivers To See Dots**

Test programs in Maryland, Minnesota and Pennsylvania aim to curb tailgating by using road markers that alert motorists to distances between vehicles. The markers serve as a tangible reminder of commonly taught driving guidelines such as the "two-second rule," which urges drivers to stay at least two seconds behind the car ahead. Unlike the two-second rule, however, the road markers provide

motorists with accurate, measured following distances. In Minnesota, the dots are accompanied by signs reading "Keep Minimum 2 Dots Apart" while in Maryland the campaign is called "Keep Your Cool and Pace Your Space," and the dots are exchanged for hot-pink panels along the side of the road.

### **Study Looks At Problem Of Uninsured Motorists**

The Insurance Research Council (IRC) released a new study of uninsured motorists that examined trends from 1999-2004 in the number of uninsured drivers by state. The percentage of uninsured motorists increased nationally from 12.7 percent to 14.6 percent. Chances are about 1 in 7 that an at-fault driver in a crash is uninsured. IRC study examined data from 11 insurers representing about 58 percent of the private auto insurance market. For further information, <http://www.ircweb.org>

### **Driver Aging And Its Effect On Male And Female Single-Vehicle Accident Injuries**

This study published in the Journal of Safety Research explores the differences in injury severity between male and female drivers, and across the different age groups, in single-vehicle accidents involving passenger cars. Results show statistically significant differences in the factors that determine injury-severity levels between male and female drivers and among the different driver age groups. A better understanding of age and gender differences can lead to improvements in vehicle and highway design to minimize driver injury severity. This paper provides some new evidence to help unravel this complex problem.

Source: Islam S, Mannering F. J Saf Res 2006.

### **Meharry-State Farm Alliance Hosts D.C. National Safety Summit To Address Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Among Diverse Populations**

A newly-released study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in Washington reveals that some minorities, including African Americans, Latinos and American Indians, are far more likely than the general population to be killed in motor vehicle crashes -- highlighting a significant and largely overlooked public safety issue. National experts speculate that cultural differences among minorities and lack of proper seatbelt safety training may account for the disparity. To address the public health crisis fueled by these and similar disparities among a range of diverse populations, the Meharry Medical College -State Farm Alliance, convened a National Safety Summit, July 6-7, 2006, in Washington, D.C.

### **New Software To Predict Traffic Jams In Advance**

A Business Magazine article reports that Inrix, a startup in Kirkland, Washington is offering a service called the Dust Network that predicts traffic flow a day to a year ahead of time. By using a complex algorithm that factors in hundreds of data points, from a freeway's history of traffic snarls to a neighborhood school's plan for a half-day of classes. Bryan Mistele, CEO of Inrix, says the goal is to help drivers know in advance how long the detour will take. Major portals, including Yahoo (Charts), are planning to integrate the Dust Network into their map services. BMW is also set to offer it in upcoming models.

### **News from the USDOT**

#### **The Interstate Is 50 Years Old this Month**

Fifty years ago, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower signed the law that authorized construction on the Interstate system. The laws signed on that day also provided for the Highway Trust Fund, which has provided the economic foundations for the Interstate system for the last 50 years. The Interstate system is widely credited as having been a major factor in the economic success of the US since its construction and is at present the world's largest and most complex network of roads.

### **New NHTSA Administrator Says Vehicle Safety Is A Family Issue**

Nicole Nason, new NHTSA administrator has wasted no time in focusing on vehicle safety. She will announce mandated electronic stability control (ESC) later this summer and intends to push for implementation of other safety technologies, as well. Nason's father, the local head of police highway patrol in Suffolk County, New York, taught her to drive. Nason says that auto safety starts with families, and wants parents to feel empowered to set rules for driving. She asserts, "You should not take for granted the trip to and from work, or the trip to and from school, or the trip to and from the grocery store or dry cleaners. Parents are rushing all the time. But vehicle safety affects every family and it needs to be at the top of the family's list." Her parents were involved in a traffic crash caused by an impaired underage driver. Nason's father is the head of the highway patrol in Suffolk New York.

### **States Seek Legislation To Limit Data from "Black Boxes"**

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there are roughly 30 million U.S. vehicles out on the road with "black boxes." Anywhere from two-thirds to 90 percent of new vehicles have them, NHTSA reports. State legislatures are working on efforts to regulate "black boxes" or vehicle data recorders, often referred to as electronic on-board recorders, to give vehicle owners control over any data collected. At least 20 states have at least considered efforts this year to regulate information from black boxes. California was the first state to regulate the recorders in 2004. Information that could be tapped includes the vehicle's speed, direction of travel, location.

### **Work-Life**

#### **Report Cites Problems With Workplace Wellness Programs**

A report in the June 2006 edition of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine finds that many worksite wellness programs that promote healthy behavior and disease prevention are not comprehensive, are not long-term, and are not marketed to people who could benefit the most. Despite the increase in scope and frequency of workplace wellness programs, the results of these programs have not been as positive as studies documenting their impact suggest they should be. Authors of this report, assert that employees should have tangible incentives to participate in wellness programs. In a sample of 200 employees who had not responded to mailings asking them to call an 800 number to complete an expanded health risk appraisal, the response surged after they received \$20 for participating, the report found.

#### **Neurobiology Research Suggests Alcohol Damages Teen Brains**

The New York Times reported on July 4th that there is mounting research suggesting that alcohol may damage the developing brains of teenagers. Experts once believed that it took a long period of heavy drinking to injure the brain. Preliminary animal research has shown that doses of alcohol similar to binge drinking episodes may cause cellular damage to the forebrain and hippocampus of adolescents, perhaps explaining why people who begin drinking at a young age are at much higher risk of becoming alcoholics. Studies also have shown that young drinkers perform poorly on a variety of cognitive tests. "Clearly, something is changed in the brain by early alcohol exposure," said Scott Swartzwelder, a neuropsychologist at Duke and at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Durham, N.C.

#### **More Restrictive Teen Graduated Licensing Laws Save Lives**

According to a recently released report by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and Medicine, deaths for 16-year-olds were reduced by up to 21 percent in states with the most restrictive graduated licensing laws. Programs with five or more restrictions had the biggest life-saving benefit; those include: age requirements for learner's permits, intermediate and full licenses; a three-month waiting period before the intermediate stage; nighttime driving limits; restrictions on the number of passengers;

and 30 or more hours of supervised driving. Just 19 states have laws that include all those provisions. Less stringent laws reduced fatal crashes among 16-year-olds by 11 percent.

### **Devices Can Monitor Older Drivers To Reassure Caregivers**

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, people overage 65 will make up 22 percent of licensed drivers by 2030. The Wall Street Journal reported on June 29 that companies were rushing to devise products to give their caregivers peace of mind. New monitoring devices can help prevent accidents or locate a driver when something goes wrong. Exmovere LLC is offering a Bluetooth-enabled wristwatch to monitor wearer's vital signs, Gemini Technologies LLC has a personal GPS-tracking device, while Alltrack USA offers similar products geared for monitoring teens, but they can be used for the elderly.

### **Pixar Movie "Cars" Premise Features Drowsy Driving**

Ignoring the signs of fatigue and driving longer than safety would permit has disastrous effects for the 18-wheel truck, Mac, in the popular kids' animated movie out this summer, Cars. In this family-oriented film in which all characters have engines and wheels, viewers can clearly see the effects of fatigue: heavy, droopy and finally closing eyelids, a drifting truck followed by jerky driving as it tries to get back into the lane and then swerving and disaster. Unlike real-life probability, no "character" is killed or injured, but in the movie, drowsy driving leads to serious consequences and sets off an unforgettable chain of events. So if you have a kid, grandkid, niece, nephew or neighbor – or just want a light show – go see Cars and how it presents drowsy driving. See the trailer at <http://disney.go.com/disneypictures/cars> Sourced from the National Sleep Foundation.

### **International Traffic Safety News**

#### **Heavy Work Schedules Cause Risky Driving Behavior**

Unrealistic work schedules force drivers to drive too fast, skip rest-stops and take unnecessary risks are making them a danger behind the wheel, a new study produced on behalf of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles and published in the AA Motoring Trust's Living With The Van Report has found. Some drivers quizzed as part of the study admitted that as a result they eat, drink and read maps while driving – often while tired. Although the report applauds many UK companies for their efforts in protecting drivers on the road, it also highlights serious flaws that are compromising safety and putting all road users at risk. Most tradesmen were unsure whether their companies had a written safety policy and, with one exception, no specific driving induction procedures existed. For further information, <http://www.aatrust.com>

#### **UK Companies Fail to Check For A Driver's License**

New research shows that almost half (47%) of all UK companies fail to ask their opt-out drivers whether they are qualified to drive a car on business. Some 64% of business drivers, both company car and opt-out drivers, are not required by their employers to give details of any motoring convictions they may have or don't know if they are required to do so. The research was conducted by the fleet management firm, Arval with over 1,000 drivers.

#### **Drivers Fail to Protect Against Whiplash**

UK road safety charity, Brake found in a survey that nine out of ten drivers are failing to protect themselves against whiplash by setting headrests incorrectly. Sixty-five percent of drivers surveyed did not know the correct position for a head restraint. Mary Williams, chief executive of Brake, said: 'It only takes a few seconds to adjust your head restraint before every journey but the devastating effects of whiplash and spinal damage can be life-long. Whiplash is accountable for more than 200,000



spinal injuries a year, including 2,000 permanent disability cases. To offer adequate protection, ensure the head restraint is as high as the top of the head.

### **Radio Technologies to Make Cars Safer**

"We will reduce the number of traffic fatalities to 5,000 or less in fiscal 2012!" This statement was made in January 2006 by the National Information Security Center of Japan, under Prime Minister Jun'icho Koizumi, in its goal to make Japan the nation with the lowest traffic accident count in the world. The government has made the decision to develop a practical Infrastructure-Cooperative Safe Driving Support System to achieve this numerical target. Radio communications will be used to swap information between vehicle, roadway and pedestrians to reduce traffic accidents.

### **UK Parliament Seeks To Add Penalty Points For Driver Distraction**

Under proposals in the Road Safety Bill, currently going through Parliament incidents of driver distraction would see drivers receiving penalty points as opposed to just a fine. Three points would be doled out for using a mobile, eating or drinking and reading while behind the wheel. It is hoped that the risk of receiving penalty points for not having proper control of the vehicle will encourage people to think before they take their eyes off the road.

### **Company Car Drivers Speed**

Analysis of 100,000 UK company car drivers found that 16,000 had received tickets in 2005, while for UK motorists as a whole the ratio was one-in-10. The research, carried out by vehicle management firm LeasePlan COMPANYY found that car drivers were more likely to be caught speeding than other road users. Companies are dependent on fleet managers to have a rigorous license checking procedure in place. Commentators suggest that although the burden of responsibility ultimately lies with the driver, company managers also have a duty to ensure their employees are driving safely. For further information, <http://www.yesinsurance.co.uk/insurance-media-centre/17291525/company-car-drivers-more-likely-to-speed.html>

### **Computers To Aid Drivers By Reading Their Minds**

Scientists at Cambridge University are developing a computer that will 'read' the thoughts and moods of drivers by analyzing their facial expressions. It could be installed in cars as a safety feature within five years and is being aimed at a means of increasing safety, for example, alerting a driver when he is becoming tired. The computer program is linked to a camera and tracks 24 facial expressions.

### **French Study Finds Overtired Drivers Continue Driving**

Do you know when you're too tired to drive? That was the question on the minds of French researchers who recently investigated whether drivers could recognize their own signs of fatigue and then take precautions to avoid drowsy driving crashes. The researchers examined crash data from nearly 13,300 road crashes and interviewed participants about their driving habits and fatigue. The results found that drivers who admitted to driving sleepy a few times a month were 1.5 times more likely to get into a crash than those who did not drive while sleepy. Importantly, the researchers noted that while motorists were likely to say that they recognized when they were sleepy, they were unlikely to take preventative measures to combat drowsy driving. The report was published in the British Medical Journal. Sourced from the National Sleep Foundation.